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NEWSWEEK
19 October 1981

Uniting Against Libya

Anwar Sadat's last joint venture with the United States was an ambitious new strategy for dealing with Libya's Col. Muammar Kaddafi. Administration strategists have begun intensive planning with Egypt for a combined response to a Libyan attack on the Sudan or other Soviet-backed aggression in North Africa. The two countries will soon form a joint military commission to help plan such operations—including a possible Egyptian invasion of Libya, though Egypt's military isn't ready to take on Kaddafi yet. The Administration has already decided to accelerate deliveries of weapons, probably including Redeye anti-aircraft missiles to Sudanese President Jaafar Nimeiry. Says one Reagan strategist: "We don't necessarily want to kill Kaddafi; we just want to tie him up."

The Carter Administration discouraged such thinking by the Egyptians, but the Reagan team reversed American policy and began talks with the Egyptians early this year after Sadat suggested an invasion of Libya to counter Kaddafi's expansionism. Although there is no evidence linking Kaddafi to Sadat's assassination, the murder has given the project new momentum. A still-secret CIA report has identified as many as sixteen terrorist training camps for foreigners in Libya. NEWSWEEK has also learned that Kaddafi reacted to the downing of two Libyan jets over the Gulf of Sidra last August by ordering the assassination of the U.S. ambassador to Italy, Maxwell Rabb, 71, who is Jewish and a friend of President Reagan—a plot that was aborted when Italian police deported ten suspected Libyan hit men. Washington officials now believe Kaddafi has called off the assassination attempt, but they are not entirely certain. After the Gulf of Sidra confrontation, U.S. intelligence also picked up evidence that Kaddafi had hatched yet an-

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a message warning him to call off the scheme. Kaddafi responded by quoting a verse from the Koran challenging Carter to supply evidence to back up his charge. When Carter did so—in detail—Kaddafi exploded, but the plan was called off. One would-be assassin was captured; the other escaped.

Bright Star: The United States and Egypt will test some of their contingency plans next month in a joint military exercise called Operation Bright Star. Although details have not been decided, U.S. strategists are considering an airlift of Egyptian troops to the Sudan under the cover of AWACS aircraft and also the dispatch of a small detachment from the Rapid Deployment

Force to join the maneuvers. In response to an attack on the Sudan or other Libyan provocations, the U.S. Sixth Fleet could be sent back into the Gulf of Sidra to distract Kaddafi's air force and pose problems for Soviet supply ships and oil tankers carrying oil out of Libya. "Those two jets were a sample," says a U.S. official. "We are willing to go to the legal limits." The main obstacles to the plans are the sorry state of Egypt's military and the now uncertain state of its politics. Egypt has 367,000 men under arms compared with Libya's 53,000, but Libya has 2,700 tanks and 500 top-flight aircraft, according to an Egyptian military attaché. "Every plan is ready," he says. "But believe me, we need equipment to fulfill our plans. We are in a hurry—any delay will be dangerous."

MICHAEL REESE with JOHN WALCOTT
in Washington and bureau reports

Kaddafi with Yasir Arafat: A threat too long ignored?

Patrice Barrat—Gamma-Liaison

